

Study 5 – Isaiah 40-66

Before we begin: What do you think it really means for us to pray “Your kingdom come?”

Jumping ahead in time:

- Ch 1-39 were focused on the Assyrian threat – with reference to two particular kings Ahaz (732–715 bc) and Hezekiah (became king in 716BC and reigned 25 years)
 - The fall of the Nth Kingdom (722 BC) happened in the 6th year of his reign
- Ch 40-66 look forward to (and beyond) the
 - Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem (587 BC)
 - The carrying off of large sections of the population to Babylon in exile
 - The fall of Babylon and the return of some of the exile under the Persian King Cyrus (538BC)
- It is argued by Barry Webb that the more generalised historical description of ch40-66 (with the exception of the Cyrus references of 44:28, 45:1, 13) reflects the generalised vision of the singular original person of Isaiah.
 - Objection to Isaiah himself being the author of this second section based on the Cyrus reference is a dogmatic and narrow view of nature of prophecy in the OT.

Isaiah 40-55

- The threatened judgment has taken place
 - **Isaiah 42:21-25** ²¹ It pleased the LORD for the sake of his righteousness to make his law great and glorious. ²² But this is a people plundered and looted, all of them trapped in pits or hidden away in prisons. They have become plunder, with no one to rescue them; they have been made loot, with no one to say, "Send them back." ²³ Which of you will listen to this or pay close attention in time to come? ²⁴ Who handed Jacob over to become loot, and Israel to the plunderers? Was it not the LORD, against whom we have sinned? For they would not follow his ways; they did not obey his law. ²⁵ So he poured out on them his burning anger, the violence of war. It enveloped them in flames, yet they did not understand; it consumed them, but they did not take it to heart.
 - **Isaiah 48:3** ³ I foretold the former things long ago, my mouth announced them and I made them known; then suddenly I acted, and they came to pass.
- Cyrus the Persian leader chosen to bring the fall of Babylon
 - **Isaiah 45:1** "This is what the LORD says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut:
 - **Isaiah 47:1** "Go down, sit in the dust, Virgin Daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne, Daughter of the Babylonians. No more will you be called tender or delicate.
- And to resettle the people in the land and rebuild Jerusalem
 - **Isaiah 45:13** ¹³ I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness: I will make all his ways straight. He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free, but not for a price or reward, says the LORD Almighty."
 - **Isaiah 44:28** ²⁸ who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt," and of the temple, "Let its foundations be laid.'"

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- The main concern of these chapters is to announce the end of God's punishment
 - **Isaiah 40:1-2** Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.
- It is seen as a present reality
 - **Isaiah 43:1** But now, this is what the LORD says-- he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.
- But it appears to have come from Yahweh rather than from Israel's repentance
 - **Isaiah 43:25** ²⁵ "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.
- God is accused of neglect
 - **Isaiah 49:14-15** ¹⁴ But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me." ¹⁵ "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!
- Yet his actions are defended as measured and reasonable responses to the people's rebellion rather than neglect, a rash response or weakness
 - **Isaiah 50:1-2** This is what the LORD says: "Where is your mother's certificate of divorce with which I sent her away? Or to which of my creditors did I sell you? Because of your sins you were sold; because of your transgressions your mother was sent away. ² When I came, why was there no one? When I called, why was there no one to answer? Was my arm too short to ransom you? Do I lack the strength to rescue you? By a mere rebuke I dry up the sea, I turn rivers into a desert; their fish rot for lack of water and die of thirst.
- The servant of the Lord is introduced
 - We will focus more on the servant figure later
 - However, it is important to know at this point that the servant has been portrayed in 40-55 in the following ways
 - Humble – 42:1-4
 - Rejected – 49:1-7 (named as Israel and yet ministers to Israel and the nations)
 - Persecuted – 50:4-9
 - Humiliated in death and then exalted – 52:13-53:12

Isaiah 56-66

- This section has less historical reference, although it appears to be somewhat of an in between time. That is, in between the return of the exiles and the fulfillment of the promised redemption.
- Therefore, the concern of these chapters is dealing with the expectations of Israel.
- But importantly, the focus is particularly on the expectations after the death and exaltation of the servant of the Lord on ch 53 and the end of all history in ch 65-66 (see Webb, Isaiah, p220). This is the same period in which we now live.
- The centrepiece of the section is the speeches of 60-62
 - The exile is over, and the dispersed people are returning, the city will be rebuilt
 - **Isaiah 60:10** ¹⁰ "Foreigners will rebuild your walls, and their kings will serve you. Though in anger I struck you, in favor I will show you compassion.

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- **Isaiah 61:1-3** The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, ² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, ³ and provide for those who grieve in Zion-- to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.
 - They will recover the priestly role among the nations.
 - **Isaiah 61:11** ¹¹ For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.
 - So profound will this be that it will require new names to be bestowed.
 - **Isaiah 62:4** ⁴ No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah, {4 Hephzibah means my delight is in her.} and your land Beulah; {4 Beulah means married.} for the LORD will take delight in you, and your land will be married.
- Yet, either side of these great speeches are the complaints of a not yet fully restored people
 - they despair the absence of God's light
 - **Isaiah 59:9-10** ⁹ So justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us. We look for light, but all is darkness; for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows. ¹⁰ Like the blind we grope along the wall, feeling our way like men without eyes. At midday we stumble as if it were twilight; among the strong, we are like the dead.
 - And they long for God's revealing presence among them
 - **Isaiah 63:15** ¹⁵ Look down from heaven and see from your lofty throne, holy and glorious. Where are your zeal and your might? Your tenderness and compassion are withheld from us.
 - **Isaiah 64:12** ¹² After all this, O LORD, will you hold yourself back? Will you keep silent and punish us beyond measure?
 - They recognise their sin
 - **Isaiah 64:6** ⁶ All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.
 - God answers the prayer for revival, he will, as we have seen many times earlier in Isaiah, preserve a remnant of his people, even as he judges those who reject him.
 - **Isaiah 65:8-9** ⁸ This is what the LORD says: "As when juice is still found in a cluster of grapes and men say, 'Don't destroy it, there is yet some good in it,' so will I do in behalf of my servants; I will not destroy them all. ⁹ I will bring forth descendants from Jacob, and from Judah those who will possess my mountains; my chosen people will inherit them, and there will my servants live.
 - Thus the climax of the vision of Isaiah commences with 65:17-25 where God will renew all creation.
 - **Isaiah 65:17-18** ¹⁷ "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. ¹⁸ But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy.

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- In chapter 66 we are reminded of the latter prophet tendency to point us from shadow to reality – the shadow being the things done on earth in worship of God and to relate to him now, the realities being the other worldly or future things that the shadows point to
 - **Isaiah 66:1-2** This is what the LORD says: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be? ² Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?" declares the LORD. "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.
- The vision concludes with the familiar refrain of both blessing and judgement. God will renew and restore, but he will also come in judgement on the wicked
 - **Isaiah 66:12-16** ¹² For this is what the LORD says: "I will extend peace to her like a river, and the wealth of nations like a flooding stream; you will nurse and be carried on her arm and dandled on her knees. ¹³ As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem." ¹⁴ When you see this, your heart will rejoice and you will flourish like grass; the hand of the LORD will be made known to his servants, but his fury will be shown to his foes. ¹⁵ See, the LORD is coming with fire, and his chariots are like a whirlwind; he will bring down his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. ¹⁶ For with fire and with his sword the LORD will execute judgment upon all men, and many will be those slain by the LORD.

Exercise:

Read through the servants songs and complete the following table:

Servant song passage	Note down the key features of each passage.	What role does the passage play in communicating Isaiah's message?	Where do you see allusions or references to these in the New Testament.
42:1-4			

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49:1-7			
50:4-9			
52:13-53:12			

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Discussion

Going back to the opening discussion about praying “your kingdom come”, how has Isaiah 40-66 informed how you might pray that prayer now?

Homework - Read through the OT3 notes for study 5

For next time – Read through Jeremiah